
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Protecting Groundwater from Floor Drains and Other Typical Discharges

Why the Concern About Floor Drains and Other Discharges?

The main concern is for the protection of human health. There have been instances of drinking water contamination from improper disposal of wastewater, solvents, oils and various industrial wastes onto or into the ground in New Hampshire. The N.H. Department of Environmental Services wants to ensure that the use of floor drains and the discharge of wastewater onto or into the ground does not cause the contamination of groundwater, which is the state's main source of drinking water. Preventing groundwater contamination is also the property owner's concern, because the owner is responsible for preventing—and cleaning up—contamination. When groundwater does become contaminated, cleanup costs can easily run into tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Do I Have to Let DES Know About Discharges?

Any regular discharge of non-domestic wastewater to the ground must be registered with, and in some cases requires a permit from, the DES Water Division.

Can I Continue to Discharge to the Ground?

While the state does allow some groundwater discharges as long as they are properly registered or permitted (see table of examples on following page), state rules prohibit any discharge to the ground of non-domestic wastewater containing a regulated contaminant (see box at right) without treatment with best available technology. Your first step is to determine whether your wastewater contains regulated contaminants or whether you store or use regulated contaminants in the area served by a floor drain. If the answer is no, you may continue the discharge by registering it with DES using the [“Registration and Notification Form For Floor Drains and Discharges to Groundwater”](#) (see attached form).

What Is A Regulated Contaminant?

State law (RSA 485-C:2 XIII) defines a regulated contaminant as “any physical, chemical, biological, radiological substance or other matter, other than naturally occurring substances at naturally occurring levels, in water which adversely affects human health or the environment.” Consult the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for the products you use; see the disposal information in the “Spills or Leaks” section of the MSDS.

What Are My Options?

If the wastewater or the area served by the floor drain does contain regulated contaminants, you must choose one of the following five options:

1. Eliminate the discharge; permanently seal the drain to prevent releases to groundwater.

2. Eliminate regulated contaminants from the wastewater or, if a floor drain, eliminate regulated contaminants from the area served by the floor drain and register the discharge with DES.
3. Connect the drain or discharge line to a municipal sanitary sewer in accordance with DES and local regulations.
4. Connect the drain or discharge to a registered holding tank that meets DES requirements.
5. Obtain a groundwater discharge permit. This is allowed only if the wastewater receives best available treatment and meets ambient groundwater quality standards.

If you choose options # 1-4, you must file the attached registration and/or notification form with DES.

If you intend to continue the discharge as is (option #5) Contact DES for a groundwater discharge permit application.

Discharges Generally Allowed with Registration	Discharges Requiring a Permit	Discharges That Are Not Allowed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beauty salon wastewater • Kennel wastewater • Bathroom floor drains • Non-contact cooling water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car washes • Non-domestic wastewater from industry or commercial business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floor drains where regulated substances are stored • Laboratory sinks • Manufacturing process water • Floor drains at automotive facilities

How Do I Seal My Floor Drain?

First, you need to be certain that no contaminants have been released to groundwater. If you are not familiar with the property's history, or if it is possible that regulated contaminants have been released to the ground through the drain, you should contact an environmental consultant to investigate (Contact DES for a list of consultants). If you are positive that no regulated contaminants were ever discharged to the floor drain, you must fill out the attached "[Discharge Well & Floor Drain Pre-Closure Notification Form](#)" and submit it to DES at least 30 days prior to sealing the floor drain(s) with concrete. However, this does not remove any future liability associated with the drain. It is customary when property is to be sold or refinanced to perform an environmental assessment (sampling) of floor drains as well as other locations where contaminants may have been released.

What About Connecting to a Municipal Sanitary Sewer?

Connections to your municipal sanitary sewer are controlled by the local sewer authority. Contact the local authority regarding restrictions. Some local sewer authorities do not allow connection of floor drains, while others allow connection only with adequate pretreatment (e.g. oil/grit separator) or other controls. If you connect a floor drain to a municipal sanitary sewer, you still need to notify DES using the attached notification form.

What Are the Requirements for Holding Tanks?

DES has design standards for holding tanks. For more information please review fact sheet WD-WSEB-22-8 "[Holding Tanks for Floor Drains](#)."

For Additional Information

For more information about floor drains and other discharges to groundwater please visit the DES Drinking Water Source Protection webpage at www.des.nh.gov/dwspp, or call (603) 271-2858.

For additional information, please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.state.nh.us or visit our website at www.des.nh.gov/dwgb. All of the bureau's fact sheets are on-line at www.des.nh.gov/dwg.htm.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of January 2007. Statutory or regulatory changes, or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.